



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Victoria Church of England Voluntary Aided Infants' and Nursery School

Prince Edward Street, Berkhamsted HP4 3HA

Previous SIAMS grade: Outstanding

Current inspection grade: Good

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority: Hertfordshire

Dates of inspection: 10 February 2015

Date of last inspection: 15 September 2009

School's unique reference number: 117423

Headteacher: Zoe Kernohan-Neely

Inspector's name and number: Lindsay Fraser 107

School context

Victoria Church of England VA School reopened on 1 September 2013 when it was re-designated an Infants' and Nursery School from a First School as part of the reorganisation of schools in Berkhamsted. The school has also undergone significant leadership changes in the past few years. The substantive headteacher was appointed in April 2014. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The number of pupils qualifying for additional funding through Pupil Premium is well below the national average as is the number of pupils with special educational needs.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Victoria Church of England Voluntary Aided Infants' and Nursery School as a Church of England school are good.

- The vision, passion and drive of the substantive headteacher has ensured that there is a clear understanding throughout the school community that this is a church school in which God, truth and integrity are central to all actions, thus reinvigorating the Christian distinctiveness.
- The commitment of the clergy from St Peter's Church is making a significant impact on the staff and pupils' experience of collective worship and on the Christian character of the school.
- The dedication of the governing body, whose Christian values put the pupils at the centre of all their actions, has sustained the school through change and challenge.
- The Christian character of the school enhances spiritual, moral, social and cultural education.

Areas to improve

- Improve the consistency and quality of teaching and assessment procedures in religious education (RE) to improve progress and attainment for pupils of all abilities.
- Develop pupils' involvement in planning, leading and contributing to collective worship to deepen their spiritual awareness and understanding of worship.
- Raise the profile and understanding of prayer and reflection within the school through staff training.

The school, through its distinctive Christian character, is good at meeting the needs of all learners.

It is clear that the school's Christian character informs all decisions regarding the provision of teaching and learning for all pupils and especially those who are disadvantaged. Pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve standards above national expectations. Pupils have a very good understanding of Christian values. They use language well to express the importance of the values in their learning and in their behaviour. These young pupils are at the early stages of relating the Christian values to gospel teaching. However, one pupil was able to link the temptations of Jesus to their value of perseverance. Pupils behave very well; they value this behaviour which exemplifies the school aims of 'knows, understands and lives by core Christian values'. One pupil, reflecting the views of many, stated, 'We are all good, we listen and we are kind'. Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of their school as a church school. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is well developed through the eco club and fair trade activities. Led by a dedicated teacher, the eco club meets monthly, with twice termly letters communicating their vision and activities. Although very young, pupils are developing an excellent sense of the need to look after their world together with a realisation that they can make a difference. They understand that the actions of the eco club are based on caring for God's world. Opportunities for fund-raising and charity giving also ensure that pupils are growing up with a sense of responsibility for the needy in the world. As one parent, reflecting the views of several parents, stated 'My child's understanding of Christianity is growing daily; I could not fault the school in terms of its approach to religion'. Many parents speak positively with regard to the strong Christian principles upon which the school is now growing. Whilst prayer and reflection areas are established in all classrooms use of them is limited. Spirituality, a strength in the previous inspection, is an area identified for further development. There have been considerable changes in staffing in recent years together with changes in leadership. The school staff feel that the Christian ethos has helped to sustain relationships through this time and state that mutually supportive relationships within the school have strengthened further. They feel supported and inspired by the headteacher whose leadership is further developing the school's Christian ethos. The school has identified that a greater emphasis in 'learning from religion' in RE lessons will further complement the contribution of the values education to the school's Christian character.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good.

Following a significant turn-over of staff the need to rebuild the importance and provision of collective worship is now being met. Whole school worship is carefully planned to ensure that the value of the month is underpinned by the stories and teachings from the gospels and develops an understanding of the person of Jesus and an understanding of the Holy Spirit. During the inspection pupils listened to the story of the wedding at Cana as part of collective worship. Pupils were able to talk about who trusted Jesus and why. They were then able to relate this to their monthly value of trust. To denote the beginning of collective worship pupils remove four items from the worship box which they set up on the worship table. Pupils are able to explain the religious significance of the green cloth for ordinary time, the Bible for the word of God, the cross for the death of Jesus and the importance of the candle. One pupil explained that the candle signifies the Holy Spirit as 'Jesus in our hearts'. Pupils understand the importance of collective worship and enjoy the variety of provision. The youth worker regularly leads class worship, a very special time in the week for the pupils, which also provides professional development for less experienced teachers in leading worship. Teachers are encouraged to participate in collective worship through contributing their own experiences or leading prayer, thus creating a sense of a community worshipping together. Creating a more spiritual experience for occasions of whole school worship is an area the school is developing, together with opportunities to involve pupils in leading and organising aspects of worship. Pupils in the reception and nursery classes have opportunities within the early years curriculum to have times of reflection, together with a range of Bible stories appropriate to their age and understanding. The pupils look forward to their monthly worship in St Peter's Church and can explain that it feels very special to be in their

church and gives them a feeling of peace. In some classes opportunities for prayer and an understanding of prayer are evident. This practice, however, is inconsistent and has little impact on pupils. This is an area which the school has highlighted for development.

The effectiveness of the religious education is satisfactory.

Pupils clearly understand the importance of their RE lessons and parents know that their children are taught about the main teachings, beliefs and practices of Christianity and some other world faiths. Whilst there is progress and an enthusiastic engagement of pupils in lessons, attainment is not as high as in other subjects. Following a period without any subject leadership the headteacher has now taken on the responsibility for RE and has established the local authority's RE syllabus as the basis for planning. Assessment is also currently an area being reviewed. Professional development is taking place at all levels to address subject knowledge and teaching and learning strategies. Training in terms of theological knowledge has been provided by the clergy to support the teaching of RE; this has served as an inspiration and encouragement for teaching staff. Senior staff can now provide evidence of an improvement in the quality of RE teaching because monitoring of lessons has identified good teaching with some outstanding elements. In a Key Stage 1 lesson observed during the inspection, effective learning strategies were evident. Pupils were able to explain in detail the Christian characteristics of their school in preparation for sending letters to a school in India. Evidence in pupils' work indicates increasing opportunities to reflect on Christian teachings and those of other faiths.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is good.

The school has faced many changes and challenges during the Berkhamsted reorganisation of the school system and the long period of unsettled leadership. Remaining a constant in times of change and uncertainty has been the strong presence of the governing body, together with the supportive partnership of the church, both maintaining an unswerving Christian ethos in the school. The appointment of a headteacher less than a year ago has reinvigorated further the school as a church school. The headteacher has a very clear Christian vision, shared and supported by the governing body, that 'God, truth and integrity' will be at the heart of the school. The headteacher has an unrelenting belief in establishing the best possible provision for the education and well-being of all pupils. This has led to some difficult decision making, such as the change in September 2015 from a fully flexible nursery provision to one which enables pupils to benefit from a more robust start to their education. The governors have now established robust procedures to monitor pupils' understanding of Christian values, pupils' spiritual development and standards in the teaching and learning of religious education. To implement this, an ethos committee has recently been established. Whilst monitoring is still at an early stage, governors have identified that pupils have a very good understanding of Christian values which are impacting upon their behaviour and learning, but they have also identified that pupils are not entirely clear about elements of their learning in RE, now a priority for the school. The governors have also taken an active role in applying for funding which is available for disadvantaged groups. Diocesan consultants have given effective support to the governors to enable them to sustain and develop the school's Christian character. The headteacher has also received diocesan support for the leadership of RE to ensure the school makes rapid improvement in this area. Staff development on the Christian character of the school has been delivered by the local clergy whose commitment to the school reflects the church's desire to do their best for the school. The Victoria School Association (VSA) which supports the school substantially through fund-raising has also provided practical support for the school, such as improving the wildlife area.